

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (continued) - The Gift Of Prophecy (continued) - Today we will examine the *purpose* and *practice* of the gift of prophecy in the church today.

- 1) **THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY** - When you start to study what was actually said in prophetic utterances in the New Testament you make a surprising discovery. ***There is a glaring lack of recorded messages of prophecy in the New Testament.*** There are a few recorded messages by Agabus, but that's about it. This fact helps clear up some misunderstandings about the purpose of prophecy in the Scriptures.

I can't tell you the number of times someone has said to me, "Let's tape these messages of prophecy so we can save them and hear them over and over again." However sincerely that is said, it misunderstands what the gift of prophecy is all about. The Scriptural purpose of prophetic utterance is to address something *local* and *immediate*. It is different from preaching. It is different from teaching general Scriptural truth on prayer, holiness, doctrine, or evangelism.

Prophecy is something that's revealed specifically for the *need of the moment*. Prophecy will apply a specific, divine insight that, under normal situations, can't be gleaned from study or preparation. For example, a situation could arise in a prayer meeting when someone speaks out as the Lord directs - "***I feel we should pray right now for the missionaries in such and such a place in Uganda.***" Later on we hear that on that very night there was intense military persecution. Or, ***somebody offers a specific word of encouragement not really knowing to whom it is specifically directed.*** Later on somebody reports they were considering suicide.

I know these are just examples, and examples are usually imperfect. But the point is *prophecy speaks to that moment*. Next Sunday it will likely be out of date. There may be something new God wants to address.

- 2) **THE SOURCE OF PROPHECY** - Prophecy differs from teaching in that ***it is not the result of personal study or research.*** It is not something the speaker had planned to say at all. Prophetic inspiration, while not on the same *level* as Scriptural revelation, is directly mediated by the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 12:11 - "***All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.***" Like all the other gifts of the Spirit, the gift of prophecy is not given out on the basis of spirituality. Those who are used to manifest the gifts are not on a higher plane than the rest of the church. This keeps the one being used prophetically from swelling up in pride. Also, it should keep me alert to the danger of missing out on hearing from the Lord just because I may not like the person through whom a prophetic word comes. This is *another* form of pride that must be confronted.

- 3) **THE CONTROL OF THE GIFT OF PROPHECY** - The important verses are found in **1 Corinthians 14:29-32** - "***Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. [30] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, [32] and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets***"

It's amazing the number of truths we can glean just from these verses:

- a) ***Prophecy is not ecstatic or uncontrollable*** - The first speaker can easily stop. the Holy Spirit will not force him to keep speaking.
- b) ***The prophet is aware of his surroundings and other events*** - He can know when someone else has something to say, etc.
- c) ***People can easily control when they speak*** - Paul says they can all speak "***one by one***" (vs. 31). The prophet can and must wait for the wait moment to say what God has brought to him mind.
- d) ***The one giving the prophecy can actually recognize when the content of his words has drifted off course and needs correction.*** Notice also that he or she will be humble enough to receive direction without denigrating prophetic utterance in the future. (**Verse 30**).
- 4) **CONTENT OF THE GIFT OF PROPHECY** - The most important passage in Scripture on the content of prophecy in **1 Corinthians 14:3** - "***On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.***"

Paul lays down the *broad parameters* under which all prophecy must function. Prophecy should ***build up, encourage, and console*** the rest of the body. This means several things by implication:

- a) ***The corporate gift of prophecy is not primarily to predict the future*** - It may, at times, involve some element of a future event (ie. Agabus predicts the coming famine in Jerusalem) but it is not primarily to function as a kind of ***crystal ball***.

Even with Agabus' prophecy about the fate of Paul in Jerusalem, the purpose ***wasn't*** to tell Paul what to do (Paul already ***knew*** that) but ***to prepare the church at large for the persecution that would come upon them and to assure them all of God's continuing presence.*** It was the ***others*** who heard the prophecy who told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

- b) ***The gift of prophecy is not given to instruct the church in doctrine*** - That's why the early church, while ***embracing*** the gift of prophecy was ***governed*** by the apostle's doctrine - **Acts 2:42** - "***And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***" This is the difference between ***prophecy*** and ***teaching***. The doctrinal position of the church is

never to be based on prophetic utterance. Paul says even an "*angel of light*" shouldn't regulate the doctrinal stance of the church.

- c) ***The gift of prophecy is to bring the specific help of God to specific needs in that local body that nobody will know about apart from specific prophetic revelation.*** It can even be used by the Spirit to meet the spiritual needs of the unsaved - ***1 Corinthians 14:24-25*** - ***"But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."***

While always rejecting fanaticism, I believe the New Testament means for us all to see ***how impoverished the church will be in certain areas if the gift of prophecy is not given place.*** There will be very specific needs that will go unmet unless faithful, ordinary people step out in faith and minister prophetically.

We must all reject the excuse that would say, "Well, Pastor Don, the Bible says these gifts are just given out by the Holy Spirit. There's nothing I can do about it." But notice ***how*** the Holy Spirit desires to give these gifts to the church - ***1 Corinthians 12:11*** - ***"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills."*** This text should inspire us ***all*** to be involved with God's gift distribution program rather than discourage our expectation. The verse says ***how*** God wants to distribute His gifts and ***to whom*** - ***"to each one,"*** God doesn't want anyone left out. ***We don't all have the same gifts, but the Holy Spirit wants us all using them in some way.***

5) **"WHAT CAN I DO?"** - How can I involve and stretch myself in the ministry of the gifts of the Spirit?

- a) ***Attend church regularly*** - You have to be there to minister. These are ***corporate*** gifts. They aren't given to bless ***you***. They are for the ***church***. Even on the day of Pentecost they were ***"all together in one accord."***
- b) ***Prepare your heart through prayer*** - Make this a part of your Lord's Day preparation. Stay inwardly alert. Believe God may want to work through you. Don't let your mind grown numb or wayward.
- c) ***Fill your mind with the Word*** - Be informed, especially about what the gifts of the Spirit are like and what they are for. That is the whole reason we stayed so long with this subject. It is usually almost totally ignored in the teaching of the church. Knowing what the Word says will help you recognise what the voice of God sounds like. This will give you a ***standard*** by which you can measure thoughts and impulses.
- d) ***Remember, at some point all the gifts require a responsive step of faith - Romans 12:6*** - ***"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith...."*** Gifts don't just ***happen***. You will never be ***forced*** by the Spirit to minister prophetically, or in any other way. ***Each time you will have to trust the Spirit's leading afresh.***